HOLBROOK LIBRARY
PACIFIC SCHOOL
OF RELIGION

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 104 October 22nd, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

It was suggested in last week's News-Letter that nothing is more essential for the recovery of society than to recapture the Victorian's "disturbing conviction of individual responsibility." How can this be brought about?

THE RELIGIOUS ROOT OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

In a penetrating analysis of the present situation in an article in the current number of *The Adelphi*[1] the intimate connection is brought out between the sense of personal responsibility and a religious attitude to life. It is the vertical relation to the eternal that alone gives to the individual life meaning and purpose. The decay of religious belief has deprived life of the dimension of depth and value. The modern man feels acute dissatisfaction with his limited, individual life, and consequently he seeks release in surrender to impersonal forces. He tries through identification with the collective in history to regain that sense of exalted purpose which is denied him in his individual isolation. But the complete subordination of the individual to the State or the community does not alter human nature, but only denies and frustrates it. The soul of man cannot endure the nullity and vacuity of a personal life severed from all vertical sources. Why, then, if the demands of the collective are in opposition to the true interests of humanity, should human beings submit to them? The answer is that they do not. Conscious persons, according to their lights, are always in opposition to the process. But they are too few in number. Opposition is too difficult, and the price of the acceptance of individual responsibility is too heavy. This bald summary of the article conveys very inadequately the force with which the point is driven home that it is only through his relation to a personal God who is above history and beyond any earthly community that man is a fully responsible being.

This issue came up last week in connection with a discussion of the voluntary principle. By this is meant the spontaneous initiation and conduct of activities by individuals and groups independently of the State and free from State control. The existence of such centres of spontaneous and free activity is essential to democracy. It is important to remember that the Church is, and has been historically, the chief representative of the voluntary principle. Not, of course, in the sense that the Church owes its existence to the free choice and voluntary association of individuals, but for the precisely opposite reason that it derives its life and authority from a decisive act of God in history, that is to say, from a source quite different from the State or the human community. It is one of the momentous facts of history that the Church introduced into the western world the entirely new conception that human life has a centre and point of reference independent of any earthly community. To lose hold of that great, emancipating truth would be to set back the clock of history by the best part of two thousand years. But what of the Churches to-day? To what extent are they aware of the vital and transcendent interests of humanity that have been entrusted to their keeping?

[1] The Oaks, Langham, Colchester, Essex. 9d. Annual Subscription 10s.

THE UNDERESTIMATED IMPORTANCE OF THE EUROPEAN PEASANTRY

A letter from one of our members calls attention to a matter of the highest importance. Peasant agriculture is one of the fundamental realities of the European problem. It is the kind of fact which is habitually ignored ; but reality always has the last word, and neglect of this fact may be a rock on which the best devised plans for a European settlement may founder. The writer says:

" You say in C.N-L. No. 100 that the fact that Christian opinion in Switzerland is tending to become pro-Nazi and anti-Russian needs to be understood: and you imply that the explanation is that the tyranny and persecution in Russia have been even greater than in Germany (which I believe to be true). But I can't help thinking that part of the explanation is that Switzerland is (like so much of Europe) largely a peasant country, and that the peasantry of Europe, very naturally, has become definitely anti-Russian since the violent and brutal collectivisation of agriculture. My local newspaper reports (on what authority, I know not) that the Bulgarian peasants, in spite of their traditional Slav sympathies, have become anti-Russian since the ' liquidation of the Kulaks.' I think this a very important clue to the European situation. It is an astonishing result of our lop-sided industrial development that we English have no notion of the significance of the fact that Europe is predominantly agricultural and that five-sixths of European agriculture is peasant-agriculture. I think that unless we try to realize this we move in an unreal world: for I believe that the European peasant quite definitely prefers Nazism to Communism. (I *know* this to be true of the Baltic States.) And it is precisely the European peasant who would be left clean out of the reckoning in any Anglo-Russian settlement. Both, in their different ways, have had *no mercy* on the peasant: who (I should say) was still the most religious person in the modern world."

LAYING FOUNDATIONS FOR A NEW ORDER

Under the title " A Missionary Mission—Christ and the New Order," forty local churches, Anglican and Free, in the town of Bath have co-operated for a week in an experiment that might well be repeated in other centres. They made a combined effort to bring home a single idea—that those who are working for a better order of society may gain fresh hope from the study of the solid foundations for a new order that are being laid in the Younger Churches planted during the past century in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world. In place of the traditional presentation of missions as the work of a denominational society the attempt was made to give a picture of a world-wide community of Christians, of which we in this country are a part, having much to learn and receive from our fellow-Christians in other lands, as well as a strong obligation to give to them all the help that we can. Half-a-dozen visiting speakers, whose denominational allegiance remained an undisclosed secret, spoke at public meetings every night and visited over thirty schools and colleges. It was found that the existence of the Church as a world-wide society came to many, particularly among the young people, as an entirely new idea and evoked a keen and intelligent response.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

Subscriptions—The rate of subscription to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. ($3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. ($1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months. Back numbers—4d. each, 1s. 2d. for 6, 1s. 11d. for 12 copies. Post free.

Folders—Black rexine with " C.N-L." in gold, to hold 26 Letters and Supplements. 2s. post free.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—
THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, ARLOSH HALL, MANSFIELD ROAD, OXFORD.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by the Kemp Hall Press Ltd., in the City of Oxford.

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

OCTOBER 22ND 1941

HOLBROOK LIBRARY PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

Supplement to C.N-L. No. 104

PLANNING FOR FREEDOM

In Supplement No. 88 I tried to state the essentials of a faith which, because it is based on the ultimate realities of man's existence, has power to turn in a new direction the tides of history and to lead mankind out of its present predicament. It was suggested in the same Supplement that the dominant fact in the life of to-day is that fundamental changes are taking place in the *structure* of society, and that in the effect which these changes may have on human life the whole Christian understanding of man is involved. To know what is happening to society is thus a religious obligation.

There are few among contemporary thinkers from whom we have more to learn in regard to this than Professor Karl Mannheim. I have been waiting for more than a year for an opportunity to draw attention to his important volume, *Man and Society*[1]—a book which needs concentrated attention, and by the ordinary reader more than one reading, to be fully understood. It will, however, abundantly reward those who are willing to take trouble. It belongs to the bigness of Professor Mannheim's thought that he never supposes that the particular line of country that he is exploring is the whole universe. He explicitly reminds us that the functional or sociological approach to society, i.e., the study of how things are produced and how they work, is only one of many and that the world would be poorer if it were allowed to replace our more genuine ways of approaching reality through religious and moral experience. The impressiveness of his contribution is due to the strength and tenacity with which he holds to the importance both of functional analysis and of the direct approach to truth. His whole work is inspired, on the one hand, by a passionate desire to preserve the values of a true humanity and on the other, by the clear insight that this cannot be done by a mere assertion of the excellence of liberty and democracy, but only if we are willing to take the trouble to discover *why* these ideals broke down on the continent of Europe, and in what form it is possible to realize them under the changed conditions of modern society.

NEW SOCIAL TECHNIQUES

The crucial factor in modern society in Professor Mannheim's view is the emergence of new social techniques. By social techniques he understands the sum of the means of influencing human behaviour which are to-day at the disposal of an efficient Government.

Marx perceived the dynamic significance of technique in the sphere of production. It is not difficult to understand why he should have regarded this as the chief clue to social development, since he lived at a time when technical inventions in the economic sphere were advancing so rapidly as to dwarf the significance of everything else. What he entirely overlooked was the significance of technology in non-economic spheres, and the fact that technical inventions in other spheres, such as the military, political, administrative, or cultural, are just as capable of bringing about changes which permeate the whole social structure. The invention of the aeroplane, the tank and the bomb creates new forms of power and gives to the few who are able to control these weapons a power over the many vastly greater than when it was a matter of one man, one gun. New techniques of propaganda afford unprecedented opportunities of influencing the masses. New patterns of thought and behaviour can be popularised in a much shorter time and on a much larger scale than formerly. The inadequacy of the Marxist analysis is proved by the fact that before the war the economic organisation of the nations had become completely subordinate to politics and that even trade had to give way to military aims.

[1] Kegan Paul. 16s. 6d.

One need not be prejudiced in favour of the capitalist system, or blind to the element of truth in the class war, to see that insistence on the absolute supremacy of the economic principle does not correspond with the realities of society to-day. The only way in which we can do justice to those realities is to take what Mannheim calls a "multi-dimensional" view of society. We must recognise, that is to say, that there is not one focal point but several, and that the whole structure of society may be fundamentally affected by technical advances which may take place in the economic sphere, or in political power, or in administration or in the possibilities of psychological influence.

In speaking of techniques what is meant is, in the first place, new technical inventions, such as the telegraph, telephone, and wireless as means of mental communication ; railways, motor cars and aeroplanes as means of locomotion; guns, bombs and tanks as weapons of war; various types of machinery as means of production; sanitary improvements as an aid to health. But beyond these, and more important, are the new possibilities of organisation, administration, education and social co-operation which these inventions create. These new opportunities are accompanied by rapid advances in psychological and sociological knowledge which open up new ways of influencing human behaviour.

It is these new social techniques that are the ultimate explanation of the transformation of democratic countries into totalitarian states; and the seizure of power by the new parties on the continent, whether of the left or of the right, is the result of their quickness in recognizing the possibilities of these techniques and their vigour and unscrupulousness in making use of them. What Professor Mannheim desires to impress on us is that we are all alike involved in a fundamental change which affects our civilisation as a whole. Totalitarianism is one possible response to that change. The totalitarian systems display at a certain level a greater efficiency than democratic societies. They do this by co-ordinating all the agencies which mould feeling and opinion and directing them to definite ends. In liberal societies all forms of thought are tolerated, and the various conflicting doctrines and opinions cancel one another out. The totalitarian system gets rid of this weakness. It gives a unity to the national life by suppressing freedom. The crucial question for society to-day, as Professor Mannheim sees, is whether there is a real alternative to the totalitarian solution. There is no use seeking to counter the use of these new powerful techniques by the traditional methods of social control and education, which are of a home-spun order. The question is whether the new social techniques can be mastered and directed in such a way as to preserve freedom and promote the true ends of human life. Modern society has to be planned; if we do not have a good plan, there will be a plan of some kind, and it will certainly be a bad one. The vital issue to-day is whether it is possible to plan for freedom and to subject planning to democratic control. Unless a way can be found to make the new techniques serve the purposes of democracy, some form of totalitarianism is inevitable.

PLANNING

When one talks of planning, people are apt to think of a band of intellectuals running society from above in accordance with preconceived ideas. It is natural that such a prospect should arouse resistance in the minds of those who have been bred in a tradition of independence, self-help and liberal ideas; we are all conscious of such resistance in greater or less degree to the idea of planning. But this is not what Professor Mannheim means at all. What he has in mind is much more the growth and wide diffusion of a new type of consciousness, a new habit of mind; an awareness of the total situation and capacity of seeing things in relation to one another.

Every fundamental change in the organisation of society demands and evokes new forms of behaviour; it develops a new type of man. We have only to reflect on the different patterns of response which individuals exhibit as members of different kinds of groups to realise to how large an extent human behaviour is shaped by the social context. To control wisely the forces at work in modern society, there is needed a new kind of social awareness, and a sensitiveness to new possibilities.

The effect of the new techniques and of the resulting new forms of social organisation is to concentrate responsibility for far-reaching decisions in the hands of a relatively small number of people in key positions. The Government and the banks by the control of credit determine the trend of production. Measures of taxation and rationing adopted in war-time can affect profoundly the dis-

tribution of wealth. The day to day decisions at Broadcasting House influence in far-reaching ways the attitude and opinions of the public. It is essential that those who occupy these positions of control should be fully aware of the alternatives between which the nation has to choose, and of the values that are essential to the democratic conception of life.

But this awareness of the situation must also be diffused through wider circles. It must be something which those in key positions imbibe from their education and from the prevailing spiritual atmosphere, and they must know that their decisions are subject to the criticism and control of an intelligent and alert public opinion and of a democratically chosen Parliament.

Planning does not mean an attempt to force some preconceived utopian reform on society. It means rather the habit of thinking in terms of whole social situations in contrast with the more abstract forms of thinking which are concerned with isolated factors. By making five or ten years' plans we learn gradually to move in an agreed direction.

THE SOCIAL CAUSES OF IRRATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

Professor Mannheim is in complete agreement with what Professor Cole said in his recent Supplement about the main reason for the failure of parliamentary democracy, i.e., that when problems become too big for men to understand, the higher controlling mechanisms of their conscious minds no longer govern their actions, and the unconscious resumes its sway, so that they act blindly and irrationally. In a stable and slowly moving society, the situations with which men have to deal are generally of a kind with which their experience and habits enable them to cope. But just as in private life we are apt to lose our tempers and behave unreasonably in a situation which we cannot understand and which has got out of control, so in society people are apt to behave irrationally and violently when the society is rapidly changing and situations to which men are accustomed give place to those in which they feel that they are acting in the dark. They are swept off their feet by the helplessness of ignorance and by fear of the unknown. In well-integrated and organic societies collective impulses emanate from smaller groups and find satisfaction within this limited sphere. It is in our disintegrated mass society in which the smaller groups tend to lose their integrating power, that collective emotions are apt to break loose and acquire explosive and destructive force. The dictatorships have seen this danger, and consciously set themselves to direct these mass impulses by means of the new techniques to new prescribed objectives. We thus come back to what for Professor Mannheim is the crucial problem: Is it possible to deal with this situation in a way that is compatible with democratic control and human freedom? It is not a question of whether in the abstract we prefer freedom and democracy to any form of dictatorship—there is nothing Professor Mannheim is more concerned to impress on us than the complete futility of this abstract formulation on which many people are content to pour forth floods of eloquence. It is the urgent, practical question in what form and by what means the values in which we believe can be preserved under the conditions of modern society.

THE FUNDAMENTAL VALUES OF A FREE SOCIETY

Professor Mannheim is convinced that there *is* an answer to the question that has just been stated, though he knows that only the future can show whether there is enough awareness of the situation, enough intelligence and enough disinterestedness of purpose to enable us to find it.

He sees clearly that, if the attempt is to succeed, we must have a doctrine of the kind of society which we oppose to totalitarianism. We must have a pattern of a society which is planned and at the same time democratically controlled. To achieve this there must be a fundamental agreement about essential values expressing itself in a fundamental conformity. This is one of the seminal ideas which have power to determine the character of an epoch. It implies a definite break with the liberal conception of the tolerance of all ideas as having equal authority. We now see that liberal society was in fact living on a traditional set of values inherited from the past and unconsciously accepted by the great majority. But when a tradition of this kind begins to disintegrate, as it is doing today, and when it has at the same time to face an external danger so menacing as totalitarianism, the situation can be met only by a conscious decision regarding the values which we hold to be primary. A society which believes in freedom will not imitate the coercive methods of the dictatorships; but

it will have an ultimate faith by which it lives, and will deliberately set itself to communicate this to the rising generation through all the agencies of education. There must be certain fundamental values which will be consciously encouraged in every possible way, while behaviour of a contrary kind, such as that characteristic of the Nazis, will be discouraged and repressed.

A society that believes in freedom will consciously plan for freedom. Planning in such a society will not follow a military pattern or aim at standardisation. It will apply to a developing society the foresight that is essential to give it unity and to keep conflicting and competing forces from disrupting it. But it will deliberately refrain from exercising control over important fields, leaving, for example, to religious and cultural activities freedom for creative development. Long-range decisions will be taken by the central authority, for the democratic control of which constitutional guarantees will be provided; but as many matters as possible will be delegated to local and subsidiary authorities, thus providing for free initiative and experiment. The success of an attempt to plan for freedom must inevitably depend, however, on the extent to which public opinion, and in particular those who hold key positions of control, understand the nature of the choice before the nation and are able to see clearly the way in which particular decisions tend in the right or the wrong direction.

In Professor Mannheim's view it is the peculiar mission of this country, in which disintegration has not yet gone so far as on the continent, and in which a strong tradition of social responsibility is still an effective force, to learn how to apply the new social techniques in the spirit of democracy and freedom. But the issues are too grave and the task too great to leave any room for complacency.

How much is at stake will be plain to those who realise that the idea that a dictatorship is a temporary phenomenon is an illusion of the nineteenth century. We now know that when a minority group has obtained control of the modern techniques of government it will not relinquish them of its own accord. If anarchy and the ultimate enslavement of society are to be avoided, all political parties must unite in defence of the fundamental values of democracy. A union of political parties has been achieved during war under the threat of overwhelming danger. If Professor Mannheim's diagnosis is true, the dangers which will confront our society after the war will be no less grave than those of Nazi aggression. The co-operation of parties will be as necessary after the war as it is at present, if the situation is to be controlled. Under the pressure of war many things are happening that could be turned to lasting good. The tragic thing is that the country is not alive to their significance, and that through lack of imaginative understanding opportunities that will not recur may be missed. The planning of the period of transition is as important as blue prints of the society that is sought.

I hope I have said enough to show the importance of Professor Mannheim's line of thought; and I hope also that he will pursue it further and help us to reach a clearer understanding of the essential characteristics and fundamental values of a society based on freedom and responsibility.

J.H.O.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, ARLOSH HALL, MANSFIELD ROAD, OXFORD.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by the Kemp Hall Press, Ltd., in the City of Oxford.